

CHAPTER 6 - Harmonised Christian Faith

The Oxford English Reference Dictionary gives two of the meanings of harmonise as to bring into or be in harmony, and to make or form a consistent whole

In what sense am I using the word harmonised in my understanding of Christianity?

Well, in the sense that the TradFram³ is in complete disharmony with our current understanding of the way the world and the universe works, and becomes more disharmonised with every day that passes. And from a more personal perspective, the TradFram is in disharmony with most of my own knowledge and experiences, many of which do not come within the scope of what I have been taught as acceptable within traditional Christianity, but for me are completely authentic.

This is the logical outcome of my seeking understanding through liberal and then progressive theology which has eventually brought me to a place where my own version of Christianity has evolved to a point of personal acceptance. In other words, the disharmony of the clash between my own personal knowledge and experience and the traditional understandings, doctrines and teachings is replaced with a transforming harmony. This is hugely significant for me because the disharmony I have felt up until a few years ago left me in a state of uncertainty, an inability to make statements with any confidence, a reluctance to engage in discussions with other Christians and a general feeling of being lost. All this has now disappeared. For this reason I use the expression Harmonised Christian Faith to describe the place at which I have now arrived. However, that place is not fixed but constantly changing and evolving as I discover new insights and understanding which demand the harmony is maintained.

I can imagine this sort of approach as a cause for horror amongst some Christians who look to their framework as a certain, unchanging rock on which their faith is anchored. But is it not just a matter of degree. If you take the members of a typical congregation, of any denomination, and examine carefully their understandings and what they accept and don't accept, *within* the faith framework adopted by their church, you will find that there are differences between every one of them, some large and some small. They harmonise their understanding of the faith framework with their own *God* given intelligence, knowledge and experience, but within the parameters of the framework accepted by the church of which they are members. My HCF is much more radical than that because it steps outside the traditional faith framework of any church, but it is in the final analysis only the same process used by the church member just to a greater degree.

1. Scripture (any scripture) is a humanmade and contextual construct, which is designed to carry and support a faith concept within a textual mix of fact, myth, metaphor, and poetry, containing both obvious and hidden truths, as distinct from an approved rule book for living a life of faith for all time. All scripture, of whatever religion, is deemed to have been divinely inspired.

2. The Christian Church, in its hundreds of different forms and denominations, is a humanmade construct designed to carry, enable, nurture and control a religious

concept and worldview within a community and to ensure the compliance of its members.

3. The traditional framework of Western Christianity (for which I use the shorthand term TradFram) has carried the essence of the Christian gospel for 2,000 years. It has brought countless millions into a personal relationship with *God* and will always be acceptable to some people

4. Increasingly large numbers of people, long established in this TradFram, with a real and living personal relationship with *God*, no longer find this ancient framework compelling or credible. I stand among those people.

5. The Jesus Christ of Faith (post-Easter) is a humanmade construct conceived and developed over many centuries to carry the concepts, ideas and claims, and to express the experiences of, a group calling itself Christians. The historic Jesus of Nazareth (pre-Easter) was a real man who lived as a teacher, healer, mystic and spiritual revolutionary at the beginning of the first century CE. This Jesus presents to us the ultimate example of a human life totally filled with the presence of *God*, who had "the character of *God* incarnate"¹ if you like, to the extent that those who reflected on his ministry after his crucifixion considered him to be *God* and they recorded these feelings and concepts in the New Testament of the Bible.

6. The essence of the Christian gospel is about the Jesus Way of individuals entering into a close personal relationship with the universal life force or consciousness, the single cause and sustainer of all, whom we call *God*. And by entering this closer relationship be transformed in their motives and world view and be enlivened and empowered to live the two prime directives reportedly given by Jesus for his followers:

- a. to love this *God*, who has the nature of an unconditionally loving parent, with all that they are, and
- b. to love all those with whom they come into contact, directly or indirectly, as if they were dealing with themselves

7. Having identified the essence of the Christian gospel within the TradFram, it will be possible to preserve and express it in other terms and concepts which are authentic and credible in the 21st century. Foremost amongst these other terms and concepts are those based upon the emerging religio/scientific paradigm.

8. Something about quantum mechanics, chaos theory, morphic fields and the unified field theory.

9. Religion (any religion) is a humanmade construct, conceived and developed over many centuries, designed to carry, enable and nurture a faith concept within a community, as distinct from faith which involves encounter with the numinous, is experiential, in the Now, continuously in change and unique to the individual.

Conclusion/finding 1

The historical Jesus (i.e, pre-Easter, during the last years of his life and ministry) was an entirely different person to the Jesus of Faith (post-Easter, as conceptualised and

embroidered by the church from earliest times until today) and the agendas of the two Jesus' differ widely.

Conclusion/finding 2

While the two agendas mostly differ they do come together at some vital points which are:

f. Acknowledgment and acceptance of a spiritual dimension to our human existence, which is additional to the material world around us (including however many dimensions scientists now propose)

g. The confirmation that there is a single cause and sustaining force in the universe, known by the Jews as Jehovah, and revealed by Jesus to have the nature of a loving parent

h. That this single cause and sustaining force, we call *God*, longs for us (all of us) to seek and find him/her² and to form a close personal relationship with him/her.

1 John Dominic Crossan speaking on 'Paul and the Justice of Equality' at St Mark's Centre for Radical Christianity, Sheffield, UK, November 2007

2 *God* has no gender. Jesus addressed *God* as a male because that is what the Jews with their strongly patriarchal society had always thought of *God* as being. He was a child of his day and culture and acted accordingly.

3. The traditional framework of Western Christianity (for which I use the shorthand term TradFram